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Speech of

Hon. Jeremiah D. Botkin

1898

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Cuba.

O house of David, thus saith the Lord: Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.—*Jeremiah*.

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it can not save; neither his ear heavy, that it can not hear. * * * For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity: your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. * * * For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment.—*Isaiah*.

SPEECH
OF
HON. JEREMIAH D. BOTKIN,
OF KANSAS,
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Tuesday, April 12, 1898.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, and having under consideration the House amendments to the bill (S. 324) to authorize the Washington and Glen Echo Railroad Company to obtain a right of way and construct tracks into the District of Columbia 600 feet

Mr. BOTKIN said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: It occurs to me that the people of this country, as well as the members of this committee, are interested to-day more in another question than this question of street railways. As I have occupied but little of the time of this committee or of the House during this session, I shall be glad to avail myself of the kindness of the gentleman from Wisconsin who has the bill in charge to occupy the attention of the committee for thirty minutes on the question of Cuba.

Mr. Chairman, it is impossible at this late day to add anything new to the discussion of the questions at issue between this Government and Spain. I only desire to record briefly my own convictions, and at the same time voice what I believe to be the sentiments of all patriotic Americans.

In considering the present strained relations between these Governments two distinct problems should be kept in mind, viz. the oppression of Cuban patriots and the destruction of the battle ship *Maine*. The civilized world holds the Spanish Government responsible for both. Every consideration of humanity requires the United States to issue, without an hour's delay, an imperative command to the oppressors to quit at once and forever the Western Hemisphere, and also to demand of Spain a full and speedy reparation for the loss of our ship and its lamented crew.

From the beginning of the period of Spanish atrocities in Cuba the American people have been wrought up to a high tension of feeling and indignation. During this same period the authorities of this Government have been so dilatory as to exhaust the public

patience, to satisfy the most conservative noncombatant, as well as the most craven devotee of a cold-blooded commercialism to be found in this country or in Europe, and, in the judgment of thousands, to humiliate this great Republic in the eyes of Christendom.

Those members of Congress who have criticised the dilatory methods of our Government have been applauded by all the patriotic people of this country. But they have been contemptuously styled "jingoes" by the few who know and care more for the demands of Wall street and the money kings of Europe than for the will of the American people. The latest and most violent effusion of this kind appeared on April 1 in the Hartford (Conn.) Post, a paper owned and presumably controlled by John Addison Porter, private secretary to the President. I quote a few samples of this most vicious attack that has been made upon the American Congress for a generation, simply to show the venom of at least one Spanish sympathizer in this country:

In the whole history of the Congress of the United States that body has never before reached such a depth of degradation as during the present week. Under the guise of a desire to help a people struggling for liberty, it has kept up a constant agitation for some months in favor of intervention by the United States in behalf of the Cuban insurgents. Within the last week, however, it has thrown off its cloak and shown the true character of its conduct. Its motive in agitating the Cuban question has been, not a love of liberty, not sympathy with human suffering, but simply bloodthirstiness of the most savage description. It has been crazy to fight somebody, and Spain happened unfortunately to offer a convenient target.

After a discussion of the *Maine* disaster, in which Congress is condemned without stint for its attitude upon this question, while the Spanish Government is held up as a model of fairness and good faith, this modern apologist for the unspeakable crimes in Cuba says:

It is hard to believe that savages of this sort continue to display themselves in public in this last end of the nineteenth century of Christian civilization!

And why this senseless tirade—this screed so appropriately published on All Fools' Day? Simply that Congress, knowing the record of Spanish cruelties in every country over which her flag has floated for centuries and witnessing the crowning act of her infamies—her very intoxication with the blood of hundreds of thousands of her victims in the Island of Cuba—and moved by the dictates of reason, of justice, of humanity, of Christian civilization, demands that this Government shall terminate these horrors at once, even though it may require the military power to do it. If this constitutes jingoism, then this is a nation of jingoes. If this be savagery, we are savages. If to propose assistance to patriots struggling for independence and freedom from the most fiendish system of oppression and slavery of modern times is bloodthirstiness, we are bloodthirsty.

But this defender of Spanish atrocities threatens us with defeat at the polls. We accept the gage of battle. We are ready to meet him and his few friends, the Spanish bondholders, on the hustings and at the ballot box. The American people propose that Cuba shall be free, and will relegate to eternal oblivion any member of this body who stands in the way of this cause.

In defense of the Administration's dilatory policy, this writer says:

President McKinley, as is known to those who share his counsels, had already laid out his programme, even to the fixing of the final days and dates for each stage, before Congress made the first step toward interfering with its work.

If that is true, and the President knew he should on Monday, April 4, or at the latest on Wednesday, April 6, as was promised the country, send his message to Congress declaring for independence or intervention, or both, why did he not days and weeks ago direct General Lee to remove all Americans from Cuba? This would have prevented the disappointment of, not to say the insult to, the American people by the postponement of the message last week, under the pretext that its promulgation at that time would endanger the lives of Lee and his American associates.

In closing this most un-American editorial, Congress is thus classified:

Benedict Arnold himself was not a wiler traitor than these men, and their memory and his should go into history side by side, stamped with the eternal infamy of having made merchandise of their most sacred public trusts.

I hurl the charge of treason back into the teeth of the writer, whoever he is. The Benedict Arnolds of this period are those who, like the author of this insult, would sacrifice national honor, the cause of freedom, and humanity itself upon the altar of a heartless commercialism. It is proper to say that the owner of the paper disclaims all responsibility for the offensive article. In a note published in the Washington Post of April 7 concerning it he says:

So far as the article which has caused criticism is concerned, I did not write it nor see it until two days after its publication, at which time I promptly sent a telegram to the managing editor of the Post, expressing disavowal and regret at the exaggerated tone of the article, and cautioning the editor to be more careful in the future.

And yet his paper of March 30 and of March 31 contained editorials on the same line of denunciation of Congress, and scarcely less bitter than that which he has felt called upon to apologize for. Further still, I am credibly informed that Mr. Porter, in a personal interview with well-known gentlemen, has admitted that while he did not write the offensive editorial, and that it was not diplomatically prepared, he did inspire its spirit.

In an editorial bitterly criticising Congress, Mr. Porter's paper, in its issue of March 30, said:

Our dispatches to-day show the lines on which the negotiations are speeding. It is asserted from Washington that Spain has consented to the following settlement of the troubles in Cuba:

1. Spain to recognize the independence of Cuba.
2. Cuba to pay Spain \$200,000,000.
3. An armistice to be declared, during which the Spanish forces are to be withdrawn from Havana.
4. The reconcentrados to be fed, supplied with clothing, farming tools, and seeds by the United States and returned to their farms.

"This," says the writer, "is a consummation to be proud of."

On the contrary, it is a policy that will condemn its advocates to a just political oblivion in any and every State in this glorious Union. But it must be confessed that the people fear this to be the policy determined upon by the present Administration and enshrouded in secrecy to this hour.

In this connection the country should know that Congress has been flooded for several days with telegrams from men representing so-called business interests asking us to support the Administration in its Cuban policy, whatever that is; that these telegrams were inspired by messages sent out from Washington; and that one of the most notable of these inspiring messages was one sent by John Addison Porter.

This is simply a part of the game being played by and for the bond syndicates of the world—men who are determined that the

unspeakable murder and misery in Cuba shall not be interfered with by this Government until they have perfected their arrangements for the perpetual bond slavery of that people. To show the death grip which the money power has upon the governments of the world, and how they control and use these governments to further their own mercenary interests, I quote from a letter in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat of March 21, 1898, from its regular Washington correspondent:

"There will be no war," the American representative of the Rothschilds said in New York on Friday. He spoke with confidence which knowledge of the influences at work inspired. For two weeks the moneyed interests of the world have been quietly crowding Spain. They have negatived her appeals for loans. They have closed the ear of European courts to her advances for alliances.

It remains to be seen whether or not this Government, like those of Europe, is to continue under the domination of the Rothschilds and their agents.

Mr. Chairman, the American people well know that for about three years the most brutal warfare that disgraces the annals of time has been waged by Spain against her Cuban subjects. If our forefathers were justifiable in resisting oppressive taxation without representation, the Cuban patriots are engaged in the most holy struggle for freedom the world has ever witnessed. For three long years they have contended against great odds. Their homes have been destroyed; their old men have been wantonly murdered; mere boys have been shot down for utterances of patriotism; prisoners of war have been butchered; fair young women have been ravished by the inhuman Spanish soldiery; mothers and children and others equally helpless and innocent have been herded together by thousands, without food, clothing, or shelter, to die under the slow torture of starvation. And all this at our very door and under our eye.

We have heard much of the "unspeakable Turk" and his atrocities in fair Armenia. But I demand that our authorities shall consider the "unspeakable Spaniard" and his greater atrocities in Cuba, the gem of the southern sea. For three long years these revolting barbarities have been practiced by Spain. And yet this great Republic, the home of freedom and justice, has made no effort to bring them to a conclusion.

Saul of Tarsus stood by and held the garments of the murderers who stoned St. Stephen to death, thereby consenting to the awful crime. This Government is the modern Saul of Tarsus. From the highest official of this nation, and therefore of the world, has come no word of encouragement and assurance to those patriots in their unequal struggle for liberty. On the contrary, while admitting in message and otherwise the inhumanities of the Spanish people and the unparalleled miseries of the Cubans, this same high official has on different occasions spoken soft and honeyed words to and of the Government of Spain, expressive of high regard and confidential relations.

Mr. Chairman, the sympathy of the American people for the Cuban patriots and their horror and indignation toward the Spanish Government for its unutterable cruelties are not of recent origin. I desire to point out three facts of history that reflected public sentiment upon this question two years ago:

1. The extended and fervent discussion of Spanish atrocities and of Cuban independence by members of both branches of the Fifty-fourth Congress. There were no party lines. Sherman, of Ohio, and MORGAN, of Alabama, and ALLEN, of Nebraska, were among

the leaders in the Senate favoring prompt and decisive action on the part of this Government. HITT, of Illinois, and the leading members of the House of all political faiths were no less emphatic for the Cuban cause. PROCTOR, GALLINGER, THURSTON, and other gentlemen whose statements so recently aroused the indignation of this country have added no material facts concerning Spanish cruelties to those that were given to the country two years ago by members of both Houses of Congress.

These later statements of the case were given, it is true, from personal observation, which adds interest and weight. Is it claimed that conditions are improved since Blanco superceded Butcher Weyler, and that this is a reasonable excuse for recent delays on the part of this Government? I reply that the observations of PROCTOR, GALLINGER, and THURSTON were made under Blanco's reign, and not under Weyler's.

I repeat that the speeches in the two Houses in February and March, 1896, that have not since been surpassed in ability and intensity, reflected the almost universal sentiment of Congress and the country at that time.

2. The resolutions adopted by Congress and the votes by which they were adopted reflected the sentiment of the people through their representatives. On February 5, 1896, Senator MORGAN, of Alabama, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, reported the following concurrent resolution:

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That, in the opinion of Congress, a condition of public war exists between the Government of Spain and the government proclaimed and for some time maintained by force of arms by the people of Cuba; and that the United States of America should maintain a strict neutrality between the contending powers, according to each all the rights of belligerents in the ports and territory of the United States.

On February 28, 1896, Senator Cameron offered as an addition the following amendment:

Resolved further, That the friendly offices of the United States should be offered by the President to the Spanish Government for the recognition of the independence of Cuba.

Thus amended the resolution passed the Senate on the last-named date by a vote of 64 yeas, 6 nays, 19 not voting.

On March 2, 1896, Mr. HITT, of Illinois, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, submitted the following resolution as a substitute for the Senate resolution:

Resolved, That in the opinion of Congress a state of public war exists in Cuba, the parties to which are entitled to belligerent rights, and the United States should observe a strict neutrality between the belligerents.

Resolved, That Congress deplores the destruction of life and property caused by the war now waging in that island, and believing that the only permanent solution of the contest equally in the interest of Spain, the people of Cuba, and other nations would be in the establishment of a government by the choice of the people of Cuba, it is the sense of Congress that the Government of the United States should use its good offices and friendly influence to that end.

Resolved, That the United States has not intervened in struggles between any European governments and their colonies on this continent; but from the very close relations between the people of the United States and those of Cuba in consequence of its proximity and the extent of the commerce between the two peoples, the present war is entailing such losses upon the people of the United States that Congress is of opinion that the Government of the United States should be prepared to protect the legitimate interests of our citizens, by intervention if necessary.

This was adopted by a vote of 262 yeas, 17 nays, 76 not voting. The matter went into conference, and on April 6, 1896, the House agreed to the Senate resolution as adopted by that body on February 28. The final vote in the House stands—yeas 247, nays 27,

not voting 80. All these votes were free from party bias, and represented the overwhelming sentiment of Congress and of the country on the Cuban question.

3. Lastly, I desire to introduce the platform utterances of the various political parties in their national conventions of 1896, as reflecting the sentiment of the country at that time. The Republican platform says:

From the hour of achieving their independence the people of the United States have regarded with sympathy the struggles of other American peoples to free themselves from European domination. We watch with deep and abiding interest the heroic battle of the Cuban patriots against cruelty and oppression, and our best hopes go out for the full success of their determined contest for liberty. The Government of Spain having lost control of Cuba and being unable to protect the property or lives of resident American citizens or to comply with the treaty obligations, we believe that the Government of the United States should actively use its influence and good offices to restore peace and give independence to the island.

Mr. BRUCKER. That platform was made to get in on, was it not?

Mr. BOTKIN. Yes; and no party dared go before the country at that time with a milder statement of the Cuban question.

The Democratic platform says:

The Monroe doctrine as originally declared, and as interpreted by our leading Presidents, is a permanent part of the foreign policy of the United States, and must at all times be maintained. We extend our sympathy to the people of Cuba in their heroic struggle for liberty and independence.

The Populist platform says:

We tender to the patriotic people of Cuba our deepest sympathy in their heroic struggle for political freedom and independence, and we believe the time has come when the United States, the great Republic of the world, should recognize that Cuba is, and of right ought to be, a free and independent state.

Thus the three leading parties of the country, representing almost the entire population, are practically a unit in their latest official deliverances upon this most burning question just now before the American people. And yet two years have dragged heavily by since these patriotic utterances were read by a delighted public. They have been two years of blood and carnage; two years of nameless atrocities practiced upon the innocent and helpless portion of the Cuban population; two years of waiting and vacillation on the part of our Government; two years of our quiet consent to these butcheries. And during these awful years two American Presidents have been brought under the grave suspicion of the American people as being under the powerful influence of bond syndicates, and as being controlled more by commercial considerations than by the interests of humanity and the cause of freedom.

The country had a right to believe that the new Administration would, without unnecessary delay, formulate and prosecute a vigorous American policy upon the Spanish-Cuban question. Accordingly, Mr. MORGAN, of Alabama, introduced into the Senate, on the 1st day of April, 1897, the resolution that had passed both Houses by overwhelming majorities—the Senate on February 28, 1896, and the House on April 6, 1896. The final vote was had upon this resolution on May 20, 1897, as follows: Yeas 41, nays 14, not voting 33. Party lines were again ignored, it being a question of patriotism and not of partyism.

During the extraordinary session repeated efforts were made by the minority side of the House to secure a consideration of this resolution, which is confessedly a very mild expression of public sentiment. But some strange spell had fallen upon the majority.

Strong men who but one short year before had portrayed upon this floor in glowing colors the awful crimes committed in Cuba by the Spanish armies, and had vehemently advocated Cuban independence, now staggered at belligerency, urged moderation, and pleaded for more time to ascertain the true state of affairs in Cuba. For this purpose the President sent a trusted personal friend as his special agent to make an official investigation, promising, in a semiofficial way at least, that should the report of this gentleman corroborate the published statements of the horrible conditions in Cuba, the Administration would, without unnecessary delay, announce and enforce a vigorous policy, such as would meet the approval of Congress and the country.

The people remember that upon Mr. Calhoun's return he reported conditions even worse than had previously been described. Every man on this side of the Chamber and scores on that side were eager to vote for armed intervention and for Cuban independence. But some mysterious influence, potent until this hour, had fallen upon the Speaker of this House and upon his majority that forced them to turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of the minority, to the demands of the country, and to the piteous wails of starving victims of Spanish cruelty.

In the meantime the awful tragedy continued. Under Spanish authority our Chief Executive was maligned, our flag insulted, and American citizens in Cuba were despoiled of liberty and of life. And finally, as if to crown all their other infamies, the Spanish Government, under the guise of friendship, lured to its place of destruction the noble battle ship *Maine*, which, with 266 of as brave seamen as ever sailed under the Stars and Stripes, went to the bottom of the sea through Spanish treachery and diabolism.

The American people know that our ship and men were destroyed in Spanish waters; that the explosion was external; that the submarine mines and torpedoes belonged to Spain and were placed there under Spanish authority; that none but agents of the Spanish Government could have known the exact location of those engines of death, or the combinations by which they could be exploded. With these facts before them, I believe the American people will repudiate that portion of the President's message relating to the report of the court of inquiry on the *Maine* disaster in which he says:

I do not permit myself to doubt that the sense of justice of the Spanish nation will dictate a course of action suggested by honor and the friendly relations of the two governments.

I also believe they will repudiate the policy of the message delivered yesterday.

Mr. Chairman, the opinion held by the American people a year ago that this Government should at once accord belligerent rights to Cuba has grown into an unyielding conviction that had it done so then, thousands of Cubans now dead would be alive; that the country would now be on the road to a happy and prosperous condition; the battle ship *Maine*, the pride of the nation, with her gallant crew, would now be resting peacefully upon the bosom of the deep; the war clouds now pregnant with wrathful storm would long since have been dispersed and driven from the sky, and the honor of our flag would have been preserved in the eyes of our own citizens and of all the world. [Applause.]

The American people will brook no further delay in dealing with this question. They demand speedy and adequate reparation

for the loss of our battle ship and its crew. They demand absolute freedom and independence for the Cuban people. They demand that a people who have poured out rivers of blood for independence and freedom shall neither be required nor permitted to pay in addition thereto a single dollar in cash, or in bond either, as an indemnity or as an annual tribute to the Spanish Government or to any mercenary bond syndicate on earth. That public servant who consents to any other kind of settlement of this question than the unconditional surrender of Cuba to those suffering patriots must settle with the American people at the polls. [Applause.]

In conclusion, permit me to say that on general principles I am opposed to war; but I am ready and eager to support any measure that may be proposed by the Administration looking to the immediate relief of the Cuban patriots and to a just indemnity for the loss of the *Maine* and her lamented crew. War is a deplorable method of settling national disputes, but we deal with a barbarous nation. I long for the incoming of that era, foretold by the old Hebrew prophet three thousand years ago, when the world's swords shall be beaten into plowshares and its spears into pruning hooks; when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

But the opening day of that glorious period has not yet dawned. The Prince of Peace has not yet established His kingdom in all human hearts. Nor will He, in my judgment, until this cruel nation shall have been blotted off the map. I do not believe a government can commit the crimes that Spain has committed in Cuba and escape just and awful retribution. If it is God's order that retributive justice shall be meted out to her through the instrumentality of this Government, I voice the universal sentiment of Kansas and of the country when I say, All hail the task! [Applause.]

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